

March 1936

IN THE WAKE OF THE FLOOD
and
THE SOIL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Excerpts from Radio talks by Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace and Acting Administrator Howard R. Tolley of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, on the program for agriculture under the provisions of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Washington, D.C.

H I G H L I G H T S

From the Talk by Secretary Wallace

NEWSPAPERS HAVE TOLD of farmers along the path of the flood in Pennsylvania literally losing whole fields from their farms. Not many farms, however, would be directly in the path of a flood. Thousands upon thousands of farmers will not know how these floods have damaged them until they see the productivity of their fields mysteriously reduced by the loss of topsoil -- topsoil washed away by the heavy rains which contributed to the recent floods. Our soil conservation folks estimate that these floods have made off with as much as 250 million tons of topsoil, perhaps a third of which will go out to sea, to be lost to man's use forever. And remember that it takes Mother Nature anywhere from 100 to 900 years to replace one inch of lost topsoil.

BIG RIVERS ARE FED BY LITTLE RIVERS, and little rivers by tiny streams which rise far back in the hills. Flood control begins back in the hills. There must be few farms in the Northeastern and Middle Atlantic States which do not, in some way or other, contribute to this problem, and have a stake in its solution.

NO INFORMED PERSON expects the Soil Conservation program to perform miracles, or to function very perfectly the first year, or to provide a complete answer to either the farm problem or the problem of flood control. But so far as floods are concerned we can confidently predict that after several years of this program, a higher percentage of soil and water will stay in the hills where it is needed, rather than flooding the river valleys and running to waste in the sea.

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From the Talk by Acting Administrator Tolley

THIS NEW EFFORT to conserve and improve our land resources is a big thing. Wise use of the land is the only direct objective. Of course, shifting land from crops that deplete the soil to those that conserve and build soil will have a tendency to prevent big surpluses from piling up and reducing farm income. But the main job -- the one outlined in the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act -- is to encourage farming methods that will keep the soil of our producing farmland from blowing and washing away, and will rest and build up some of the acres that have been too long in depleting crops.

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE estimates that in 1930, one hundred million acres of crop land were in soil building or soil conserving crops. To make the best possible use of our farmland, we must increase that acreage. The goal for the 1936 program is 130 million acres in such crops -- 30 million acres above the 1930 level. Such an acreage would leave plenty of land for cash crops to meet needs in this country and to fill probable export demand. The new Soil Conservation Act directs that the program allow for production of enough food and fiber to fill normal requirements of consumers in the United States.

IN EACH COUNTY every farmer will be eligible to join his county association. Members of each association will elect their county committeemen and their own community committeemen. State committeemen for each state will be selected along lines suggested at the recent regional meetings. County and community committees will have many of the functions of the old AAA local committees, but there will be no duplication of committees to handle separate commodities. As in the past, county agents and extension specialists of the land grant colleges will give their assistance.

IN THE WAKE OF THE FLOOD

Excerpts from remarks of Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, broadcast during the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, March 24, 1936.

The broad outlines of the new farm program have now been announced by press and radio. On the Farm and Home Hour, Mr. Howard R. Tolley, acting administrator of the Adjustment Administration, explained very clearly how the program can serve farmers in every region, and how farmers can make use of it.

Nevertheless, it is not possible in a brief radio talk to clarify every phase of a program designed to be of use to millions of farmers operating hundreds of millions of acres of crop land. On the basis of what has already gone out over the air and through the press, farmers can get out their pencils and do some rough figuring, but they will want more definite and specific information before they can know exactly how to proceed.

That specific information will be put into the hands of every interested farmer just as soon as it is humanly possible to get it there. Administrative workers in the States are already busy with details. Farmers' meetings will be called in nearly every farming community in the land to explain the new program and to enable farmers to make definite plans.

The objection has already been made that the program sounds complicated. I think this objection will disappear as soon as farmers have had a chance in community meetings to see how the program applies to their individual farms. From the individual farmer's standpoint the program will not be too complex. From the national point of view, the program must appear complex. It must be remembered that American agriculture is an extremely complicated industry, varying enormously from region to region. Any program, to be of permanent

value, must take those regional differences into account. No simple formula can hope to cover the variations in land, the crops, and the farming practices of the whole United States. For purposes of administration we have organized on the basis of five great farming regions, but we know very well that within those five regions, there are at least 700 distinct type-of-farming areas. It is really one of the outstanding virtues of the new program that it recognizes these distinct regions at the start, and proposes to be guided as far as possible by regional requirements.

The eyes of farmers and everybody else have been directed during the past week to one region, the Northeast. Peaceful rivers have become agents of destruction to life and property. The Connecticut, the Merrimac, the Susquehanna, the Potomac, the Ohio, and many lesser streams have paralyzed cities and laid waste to small towns. Did all this have to happen? Could any of it have been prevented?

I raise these questions here because to some extent they involve the way we use our land, and because sound land use is the first purpose of the new Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act.

Newspapers have told of farmers along the path of the flood in Pennsylvania literally losing whole fields from their farms. Not many farms, however, would be directly in the path of a flood. Thousands upon thousands of farmers will not know how these floods have damaged them until they see the productivity of their fields mysteriously reduced by the loss of topsoil -- topsoil washed away by the heavy rains which contributed to the recent floods. Our soil conservation folks estimate that these floods have made off with as much as 250 million tons of topsoil, perhaps a third of which will go out to sea, to be lost to man's use forever. And remember that it takes Mother Nature anywhere from 100 to 900 years to replace one inch of lost topsoil.

Could this loss have been prevented? In some part, yes. Engineering structures -- dams, storage reservoirs, etc. -- can do much, but back of them, and indispensable even to them in most instances, there must be proper use of the land to prevent erosion, to keep topsoil in place, and to hold snow and water in place until it can run off gradually. If proper land use practices can reduce the amount of run-off water in most areas from 20 to 25 percent -- and we know that this is possible -- that will often be the margin between mere high water and destructive floods.

Big rivers are fed by little rivers, and little rivers by tiny streams which rise far back in the hills. Flood control begins back in the hills. There must be few farms in the Northeastern and Middle Atlantic States which do not, in some way or other, contribute to this problem, and have a stake in its solution.

Now we know that for the country as a whole grass, trees, legumes and other thick-growing plants average 65 times more effective than clean-tilled crops in preventing soil-washing. New York experiments show that in a single growing season of normal rainfall, the run-off from a single acre of corn is 127,000 gallons greater than from a single acre of meadow.

But the average farmer doesn't need to be told this: He knows it well. He knows that the 10-acre field on the back road is pretty steep to keep in corn; he knows that he really ought to keep his stock out of the orchard and woodlot, for overgrazing there contributes definitely to rapid run-off of snow and water,

and to the drying-up of his own creek in mid-summer; he knows that more of his land ought to be in legumes, or in rotational pasture, or that his permanent pasture needs liming and reseedling, or that various parts of his land might better be put into trees, permanently.

All these things he knows well, and has known for many years. To get them done, however, means out-of-pocket costs, or it means shifting land out of cash crops, and that means some temporary sacrifice in cash income. It is a rare farmer who has been able to afford that sacrifice any time within the past 15 years.

Now that is what the new farm program is all about. It is to enable the progressive farmer to begin that program of sound land use and efficient farm management that he has thought about for years. It will not pay him for poor farm practices. Nor is it a production control program. It will, however, compensate him for getting more of his land in soil-conserving crops, and for improving the land already in crops that build rather than deplete the soil. I don't mean to imply that he is going to be able to do all this in one year. His will be a long-time job, as good farming always is, and in any event he will have to remember that there is a limit on the amount of money available. But within that limit, he can make a significant start.

I like the way a New England farmer who was present at one of our meetings summed up the new program. "It looks to me," he said, "as if this would help a farmer make a long-time investment in his farm business, an investment that he has desperately wanted to make but never could, an investment that is just as much in the national interest as in his own--perhaps more, for it will be yielding a rich return years after he has gone."

That seems to me exactly the right attitude with which to view this new farm program. It is a long-time investment, not a scheme to get rich quick. It is an investment which is surely in the spirit of the preamble of the Constitution, when it commands the agencies of government to "promote the General Welfare."

No informed person expects the program to perform miracles, or to function very perfectly the first year, or to provide a complete answer to either the farm problem or the problem of flood control. But so far as floods are concerned we can confidently predict that after several years of this program, a higher percentage of soil and water will stay in the hills where it is needed, rather than flooding the river valleys and running to waste in the sea.

THE SOIL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Excerpts from a radio talk by Mr. Howard R. Tolley, Acting Administrator, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, broadcast Monday, March 23, 1936, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour.

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This is my first talk to a Farm and Home audience since I took over the job of Acting Administrator of the Agricultural Adjustment Act during the absence of Chester Davis. As you know, Mr. Davis has gone to Europe at the

request of the President, to gather facts about present and future prospects for exports of American farm products.

While he is away American farmers will be starting a new national venture in cooperation, which is just as important as the Adjustment programs launched in 1933, and, I believe, even more far-reaching. That new program is the one directed by Congress in the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. The plans for putting that program into operation are based on recommendations of farmers' meetings held recently.

Secretary Wallace has announced the basic points of the program. This new effort to conserve and improve our land resources is a big thing. It will take time to map out completely. We are pushing ahead as fast as we can and the program will be in effect this season.

Wise use of the land is the only direct objective. Of course, shifting land from crops that deplete the soil to those that conserve and build soil will have a tendency to prevent big surpluses from piling up and reducing farm income. But the main job -- the one outlined in the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act -- is to encourage farming methods that will keep the soil of our producing farmland from blowing and washing away, and will rest and build up some of the acres that have been too long in depleting crops.

In the long run such farming methods are to the advantage of farmers now on the land and of those who will come after them. But the crops that are hardest on the land are cash crops. Shifting from cash crops to crops that hold the soil and build fertility usually means out-of-pocket expense. So the new program provides for payments to enable farmers to make a start at soil conservation and soil improvement in 1936.

Approximately four hundred and 70 million dollars is available to finance this year's soil-building and soil-conservation program. Out of that sum must come local and national administrative expense as well as payments to farmers.

Farmers who apply for payments will be paid when the results of their operations are measured, and shown to meet the conditions which are specified. There will not be any sort of a contract in the new program. The only documents will be a farm record sheet and later an application blank.

For the purpose of carrying out the program, we have classified crops into three groups -- soil-depleting crops, soil-conserving crops, and soil-building crops. There are variations in the lists to fit in with conditions in different regions. But I can tell you what crops fall under each general heading.

Soil-depleting crops, of course, are those which take plant food out of the soil or leave the land exposed to severe erosion.

Soil-conserving crops are the crops which hold the soil in place, and do not draw heavily on plant food in the soil; but which do not add to the fertility of the soil.

Soil-building crops are crops which definitely add to the fertility of the soil.

The principal soil-depleting crops are corn; cotton; tobacco; Irish potatoes; sweet potatoes; rice; sugar-cane; sugar beets; commercial truck and canning crops, melons, and strawberries; peanuts, if harvested as nuts; grain sorghums and sweet sorghums; small grains harvested for grain or hay -- that class includes wheat, oats, barley, rye, buckwheat, flax, emmer, speltz, and grain mixtures.

The soil-conserving crops list takes in the annual legumes, including vetch, winter peas, bur and crimson clover; biennial legumes, including sweet, red, alsike, and Mammoth clovers; biennial legumes, including alfalfa, kudzu, lespedeza, and white clover. That's the legume list under the soil-conserving classification. The perennial grasses also are in this category -- Bluegrass, Dallis grass, timothy, redtop, orchard, Bermuda, carpet, brome, crested and slender wheat grass, or grass mixtures, when on plowable crop land and not classified as permanent pasture. So much for the grasses and legumes. There is another group of soil-conserving crops, namely, the small grains when seeded as a nurse crops, and clipped green; or when grown alone, and turned under as a green manure crop, and crop acreage planted to forest trees since January 1, 1934.

Soil-building crops are the crops which build soil fertility. Now whether a crop builds soil fertility depends partly on the nature of the plant, and partly on the way the farmer handles it. So you will find in this classification some crops which have appeared in the soil-conserving category. The difference is that in this classification they are to be handled in such a way as to build soil. Understanding that, here is the list of the more important ones:

Annual legumes, including vetch, winter peas, bur and crimson clover, when turned under in 1936 as a green manure crop. Acreage seeded to these crops in the fall of 1935 and turned under in 1936 will qualify. Biennial legumes, including sweet, red, alsike, and Mammoth clovers; perennial legumes including alfalfa, kudzu, sericea, and white clover; and annual varieties of Lespedeza, when seeded in 1936. Summer legumes, including soybeans, velvet beans, field beans, crotalaria, field peas and cowpeas, when turned under in 1936 as a green manure crop.

Forest trees planted on crop land in 1936.

The Department of Agriculture estimates that in 1930, one hundred million acres of crop land were in soil building or soil conserving crops. To make the best possible use of our farmland, we must increase that acreage. The goal for the 1936 program is 130 million acres in such crops -- 30 million acres above the 1930 level. Such an acreage would leave plenty of land for cash crops to meet needs in this country and to fill probable export demand. The new Soil Conservation Act directs that the program allow for production of enough food and fiber to fill normal requirements of consumers in the United States.

The starting point of the program for the individual land owner or operator is his base acreage of soil-depleting crops. This will be figured on the amount of such acreage he had in 1935, with allowances made for adjustments under Triple A contracts, or for unusual variations caused by such conditions as drought or floods.

Those bases will be the measuring rod for the farmer's soil-conserving payment. (There is a second type of payment, which I will take up a little later.) No soil-conserving payment will be made unless the minimum requirement for 1936 is met. The minimum requirement is that the total acreage of soil-building and soil-conserving crops shall be at least 20 percent of the farm's soil-depleting base, or else the largest percentage on which a soil conserving payment can be made. That second requirement is for exceptional cases. Here is an example. Suppose a farm had a soil-depleting base of 100 acres, and had no base at all for soil-conserving crops. The farmer can't be paid for changing more than 15 percent of his soil depleting base acreage to soil-conserving uses. He would be paid if he made the shift on the largest possible number of acres -- 15 -- even though he didn't have any soil conserving base to start with to bring his soil-conserving acreage up to 20 percent.

For shifting land to soil-conserving or building crops from soil-depleting crops, the average rate of the soil-conserving payments for the country over will be \$10 an acre. The exact amount on any farm will vary according to the productivity of the crop land on that farm. The average for one State might be \$8; for another, \$12. On a farm in either state, the payment on one farm might be \$9 per acre; on another farm \$14 per acre. On farms other than cotton, tobacco and the other four special crops, the largest acreage on which a man can receive payments for changing to soil-conserving uses will be 15 percent of the soil-depleting base for his farm.

Different rules apply for the six crops which have special bases. For cotton the payment will be 5 cents a pound on the average yield of the acres put into soil conserving or soil building crops. The largest amount of cotton land that a farmer will be paid for shifting is 35 percent of the base acreage. Special arrangements similar to those for cotton (with different rates and percentages, of course) are made for computing payments to men who shift land from the five other crops on the special list.

Those, in general, are the payments that will be made for shifting acreage from soil-depleting crops to either soil-building, soil-improving crops, or soil improving practices. Without any doubt many of those acres will be put into soil-building crops. But that is not required. The only requirement is to put it to soil conserving uses.

So a second type of payment has been provided for, that will offer special compensations to farmers who plant soil-building crops, or take other steps to make their soil more fertile. Those soil-building payments will be made for seedings of approved soil building crops on crop land in 1936, and for approved soil building practices on crop land or pasture in 1936. The rate of that payment will be set in each State by the State committee, subject to the approval of the Secretary of Agriculture. The total payment on any farm may not exceed a sum greater than one dollar for each acre in soil conserving and soil building crops in 1936. That payment is an addition to payments for diverting land from depleting crops. As you can see, this phase of the plan gives special consideration to farmers who already have large acreage in soil conserving crops.

The program provides for dividing both types of payments between landlords and tenants. Methods for such a division vary between regions and crops.

In each county every farmer will be eligible to join his county association. Members of each association will elect their county committeemen and their own community committeemen. State committeemen for each state will be selected along lines suggested at the recent regional meetings. County and community committees will have many of the functions of the old AAA local committees, but there will be no duplication of committees to handle separate commodities. As in the past, county agents and extension specialists of the land grant colleges will give their assistance.

The Adjustment Administration, in handling the national end of the job, has divided the country up into five regions, corresponding to the major types of farming in each region. The headquarters of those regions will be in Washington, and will deal directly with each State.

That's a very brief outline of the new program. Plans for this year necessarily had to be drawn rapidly. They can be and will be improved and refined. We feel that they will be of substantial benefit to American farmers and to the national welfare.

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